Will There Always Be an England?

Waiting for the end, boys, waiting for the end.
What is there to be or do?
What's become of me or you?
Are we kind or are we true?
Sitting two and two, boys, waiting for the end . . .

What was said by Marx, boys, what did he perpend?
No good being sparks, boys, waiting for the end.
Treason of the clerks, boys, curtains that descend,
Lights becoming darks, boys, waiting for the end.
—William Empson, *Just a Smack at Auden*

In ancient Greece, professional lawyers had a technique to help them remember their speeches. They would imagine themselves in a large house. Each room held an image, and as the speechmaker, in his mind's eye, roamed from room to room the images, along with the associated thoughts, would return to him.

In Britain now, all the old images are spilling out into the great Hall, like spirits on the banks of the Styx. Here is the image of 1926, the year of the general strike. What does the image carry with it? A crushing setback to the working class, the beginnings of a retreat that only ended in 1945. What's this ghost over here? The National Government in 1931, when labor politicians joined forces with the Conservatives to usher in the Depression. And here? The menace of extremism—an uncouth fellow calling himself a Communist or a militant. And this smiling girl over here? Why the spirit of national unity, an end to class conflicts, old Boadicea, herself. Some images, once proud, now look woebegone: the great victory of the Second World War, when Britain stood alone. Others look frightening. Who's this, carrying the groceries with banknotes piled on a barrow? Herr Inflation, I presume.

At the beginning of February, all the old specters were only beginning to assemble. The miners held out for a strike. Heath was finally pushed into an election, the first actually to be held with the economy slowing to a halt—the power stations running out of coal. It was an election held in conditions of major industrial unrest, of soaring inflation. Worse still, it was not an election that would settle anything, merely the beginning of a road that looks as though it might end soon with another election—perhaps even another National Government.

Robert Capa/Magnum

by Alexander Cockburn

Politicians were speaking fiercely, but nervously. They could threaten much, but promise little. As the days of the campaign passed by, they cast the runes with increasing uncertainty. Could the electorate still be panicked by the specter of Bolshevism? Did people, groaning under high prices, still believe a word they said? Was it, in fact, the "decisive" election they claimed it to be, or just a pause for breath, while everybody wondered what to do next?

[LONDON: THE LIGHTS GOING OUT]

It is twilight on a day in early February as I walk down St. James Street to keep my appointment. A few hundred yards away looms the House of Commons. Inside, they are debating the crisis. Everyone is waiting for the news. Will there be an election? Will there be a settlement? Further east, already in darkness, is the city, the financial district. It has been another disastrous day. The paper value of shares on the London stock exchange is now exactly half of what it was a year ago.

That day, at lunch, I hear two stories of ruin. Perdita runs a boutique, selling costly dresses to the middle classes. Her shop can only be lit three days a week under government regulations. Shoplifters rush in during the ill-lit hours to plunder her stock. Two major buyers have cancelled orders worth $10,000. Her main asset, the lease on her property, depreciated last year by 25 percent. She wants to get out. But she can't. No one wants to buy.

We listen mournfully to her sad story. Then Henry speaks up. He is a middle aged businessman with some properties. He claims to have lost a million dollars in the last two months. He bought stocks with money borrowed from a bank. The stocks started to slide and went on sliding. Henry hung on. The stocks would, he surmised, go up. They did not. They went down. The bank said Sell. And this is what poor Henry—who incidentally has a few properties left—has had to do.

They stare at me glumly.

"Do you think Heath should settle with the miners?"

"Never," shouts Henry. "He should force those red bastards back down the mines. He should bring the troops out. That's what Churchill did."

"But the troops can't rip the coal out with their bayonets."

"Well then, he should starve them out. Look at their wives and children. Do you know that they get welfare benefits from the state when their men are on strike? It's a bloody scandal. I work as hard as a miner myself. Cut off their benefits. You'd find those miners scuttling down the pits quick enough."

I look at Henry, his face mottled with hatred. He is breathing quickly, his hands clenched. He is thinking of his lost million dollars. He is thinking of the properties he cannot sell. He is thinking, Why has this happened to me?

It seems so unfair to Henry. He came out of the Second World War without much education. In the property boom of the Fifties and Sixties he has done well. He has voted Conservative, settled his taxes, put his daughter in a good school, and bought a fancy house in the Southeast. Henry is not used to believing that things could really get bad. He had heard people say that the Empire had ended. But he got rich. Then he heard the Labor Government would take his money away. Then he got richer still. He heard people complain, on the television, about rapacious property speculators. No one took his houses away. Then, round about Christmas time, Crisis came like a thief in broad daylight. He feels he's been screwed. He's ready to become one of the vigilantes of late capitalism. He's ready to kill.

"What about you, Perdita?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I like the Liberals."

Perdita comes from a higher social class than Henry; her father lives on his estate in Scotland. Perdita's sister engages in good works with ex-prisoners. Perdita leads a comfortable upper class social existence, with winter holidays in Switzerland, summer holidays in the Mediterranean area. The late Sixties saw the boom of Swinging London, and her shop has done well selling smartened up versions of the Swing.

"I think it's all too ghastly and pointless. I think the miners are behaving stupidly, but then I think Heath behaved stupidly, too. So I think the Liberals should be given a chance."

Henry breaks in. "You can't expect anything from that mob. They'll just hold the balance and lick whichever arse is nearer their noses. We need a strong government."

Perdita is beginning to sound like a middle class housewife in Santiago. My mind wanders. I remember the night the BBC announced, during the Suez invasion of 1956, that British bombers had struck Ismailia. I was at a minor public [i.e. private] school in Scotland at the time. The boys were mostly sons of Scottish businessmen, but some had fathers still stationed in Kenya or the Far East. As the news came through they danced on the tables, shouting and singing. They knew I lived in Ireland and had a father who had been a Communist.

"Well, you Irish pig. How do you like it now?"

Ten years before, just after the war, I used to go to my London school wearing a Russian hat.

"Hello, little Stalin," said other people on the bus, smiling. Then, in 1947, my father said it might be best if I wore a different kind of hat. Henry did not like the Russians in 1946, or in 1956, and he thinks the miners are in the pay of the Russians in 1974.

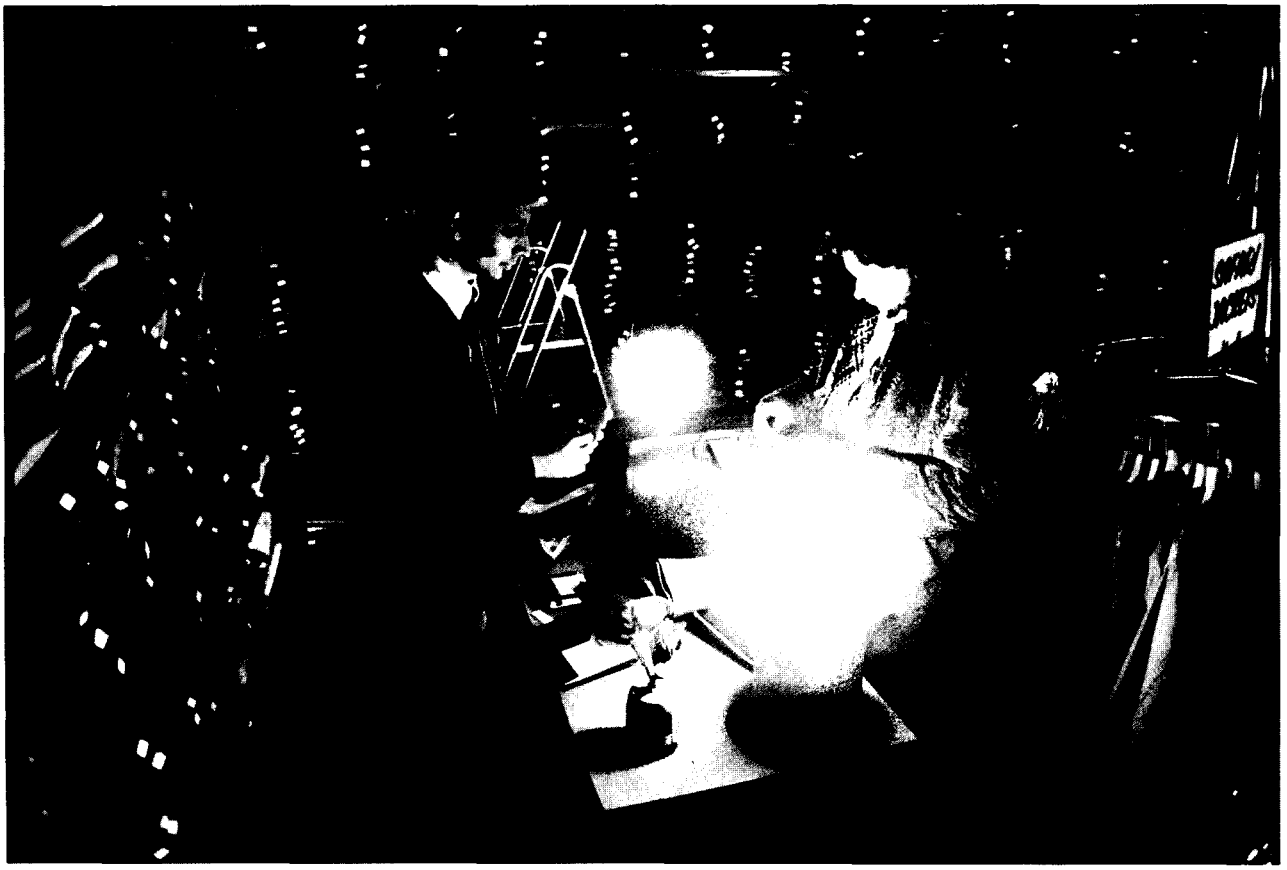
"We've got to have a showdown," he says.

Since I am feeling rich, having recently got an exchange rate of $2.18 to the pound, I pay for the lunch, which at $33 is just under half what a miner earns in a week.

[RUIN, RUIN, RUIN]

In one of the quiet streets off St. James, I keep an appointment with an acquaintance. He is a conspicuous public figure. I am shown into the sitting room. At first no one is visible. Then I see a pair of arms coming from behind a large armchair. The hands are holding up a package. Very, very slowly the hands start to open it. After the tearing sound of the paper, the hands stop moving for several seconds. Then the slow opening of the package continues. At last it is opened. There are two pieces of cardboard, from which a couple of photographs fall to the floor.

After a snort of relief, my friend emerges from behind



the chair. "Of course the mail is X-rayed, but it's best to be sure. Used to do the same thing in the war." Bombs and threats are on people's minds. Five days earlier a coach carrying soldiers, wives and children had been ripped apart by a bomb on a Northern motorway. Twelve had been killed. Five days before that two men had walked into a workman's hut in Northern Ireland and machine gunned every Catholic in the place. Three had died. A few months earlier an Arab gunman had walked into the house of a prominent London Zionist and shot him in the face. The bullet hit his teeth and he survived.

It seems, on the face of it, reasonable for my friend to open odd looking packages from behind an armchair.

I think of my brother. He lives in Belfast, and in the course of his researches into Irish Nationalism he regularly visits a library in the heart of a Protestant working-class area. To ease the long walk to and fro, since he has a bad leg, he was in the habit of carrying a walking stick. He was finally warned not to. In the dusk a walking stick can look like a rifle. If a soldier sees you carrying a rifle, even if a local resident sees you carrying a rifle, they are inclined to discover, much too late, that the rifle was a walking stick and that a terrible mistake has been made.

My brother tends to be composed about the risks of life in Belfast. A close friend of his had recently been machine gunned. The murderers rushed into his room and opened up. He was sufficiently attuned to such situations to be making for the telephone as the bullets started hitting his back, and had enough strength to dial the emergency service. The assassins had been careless enough not to finish him off with a bullet in the back of the head. So he survived.

"Lucky fellow," concluded my brother. He added that the recent machine gunning in the workman's hut was generally assumed to have been sponsored by the British army.

"You see, they didn't like the way the [IRA] Provisionals and the UVF [Ulster Volunteer Force—a Protestant organization in Northern Ireland] had agreed to lay off each other and concentrate on the British army. So the British fellows got their gunmen to shoot up a few Catholics, to heighten tension. This particular gang is supposed to have done in about a hundred and fifty fellows. Mostly Provisionals. Very effective lot—run by the Strategic Army Services."

My London acquaintance, past the momentary tension of letter-opening, discourses briefly on the crises: he is very brief indeed. "The country is nearly ruined. Very soon it actually *will* be ruined. Then everyone, finally, will realize that they *are* ruined. And that will be that."

It has been a long day, and it was not the first time I had heard the notion of ruin bandied about. Quite apart from Perdita and Henry there had been other intimations of catastrophe.

A television journalist I knew had the bright idea of taking an Oxford economist down to the poor East End of London. He set him up with an average couple earning about $120 a week, and had him explain to them the facts of life in the modern world.

I knew the economist somewhat: a bluff fellow keen on kissing everybody, bustling about the world and bringing chaos and starvation in his wake. The scene in the East End had been dire. He had burrowed into their cupboard of meager provisions. Every product was scheduled, given the

Jean Gaumy/Gamma

situation of world commodities, for a brisk rise.

Economist: "How many tins of baked beans do you eat a week?"

Housewife: "Oh, I use a lot. About 4 tins a week."

Economist: "Beans are definitely going up. The dollar is appreciating against the pound, it's gone from $2.80 to $2.20 and that's going to make a difference of about three pennies a tin, and then there's a difference in the cost of beans in the U.S. They're grown especially for the British market. In fact, we eat as many baked beans as the rest of the world put together. There's absolutely no doubt that the price is going to go up rather sharply."

On and on the economist went. Bread, jam, biscuits, coal, petrol, meat, everything was rising. Finally the housewife burst in:

"So the good life we've all been believing in is going to get worse and worse?"

"Well, I think it's going to be very difficult for anyone actually to add to their standard of living in 1974."

The housewife then put the matter in a nutshell:

"All these raw materials, such as rice, tea, they all come from underdeveloped countries. I mean, we're all moaning about our standard of living and we've got more than they've got out there, so that now that these people are asking for a fair wage, that's affecting our cost of living, because it's putting up all the raw materials what's come from the poor countries in any case."

Economist: "Well, yes."

Housewife: "So why don't governments get together? I mean if it's so clear to a working class housewife like me, why don't governments get together and sort this out?"

Economist: "Well, none of the governments. . . ." He trailed off.

Ruin, ruin, ruin. I leave my friend sitting confidently on the armchair instead of hiding behind it.

I take a taxi for my dinner party. Soon I am one of 12 sitting around a long handsome table in a large handsome house. There is a former judge there. Gleefully he talks about the picketing laws. Since the miners have to prevent coal reaching the power stations to generate electricity, these laws, along with solidarity actions by other unions, are very important.

"Fact is," he chuckles, "mass picketing in this country is against the law. The law does allow pickets to peacefully suggest to people that they should not cross the lines. But mass pickets obviously intimidate, by the actual nature of their presence. So they're illegal and we can throw the organizers in jail."

"Obviously what we hope is that some chap should hit a policeman on the head. Or maim him, or something like that."

A woman breaks in from the other end of the table, asking our advice. She had been discussing which regiment, in the case of a military takeover, would be most satisfactory to have in charge of the London area.

"We thought the Scotch Guard."

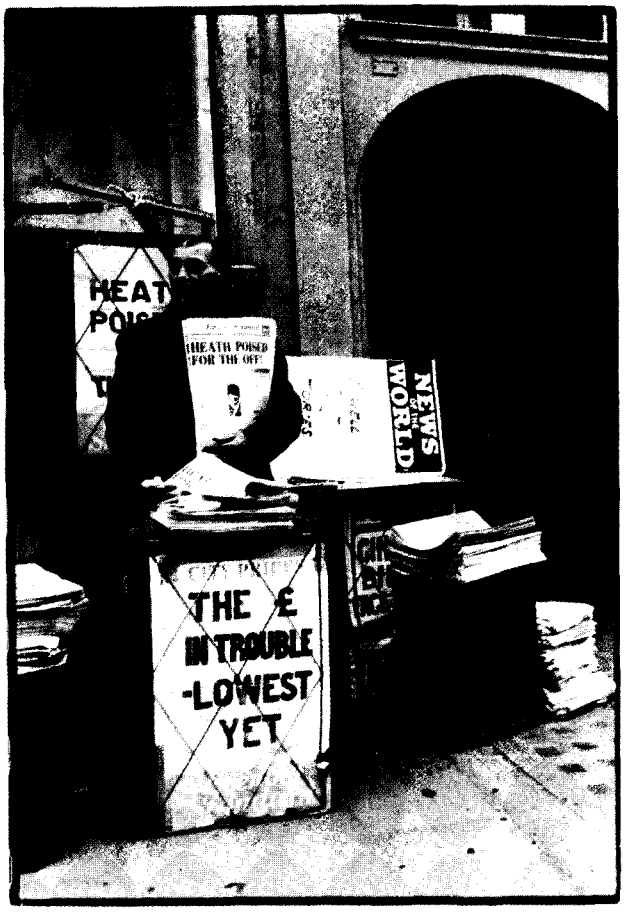
This seems a good choice. The dinner party mulls it over. An Army takeover has crossed the minds of many people.

No one actually thinks that the British colonels are awaiting the call. But the British Army has conducted counter-insurgency in Northern Ireland for the last few years. People have been habituated to the fact that half the point of having an army is to put down unruly elements on the homefront.

The authorities have beefed up the police, too, forming what is known as the Third Force. This Third Force is selected from the various police forces around the country, given small arms training, and taught crowd control techniques. They are on permanent patrol in most of Britain's major cities. The Third Force would be important in any confrontation with pickets.

The dinner ends with an amiable discussion of the People's Republic of China. All are agreed on the successes of the Revolution there. Most have been to China. Others are waiting for visa clearances.

"Those chaps could teach our unions a thing or two about hard work," concludes the ex-judge, forking some cheese into his mouth.



Jean Gaumy/Gamma

[A LEFT DECADE]

In the clear afternoon light the little mining village just outside Edinburgh looks like some parody dreamed up by a socialist realist, or a British set designer from the 1950s. The windows of half the terrace houses are broken and boarded up. An odd stray dog slinks down cobbled alleys. Washing flaps from clotheslines. The little shops seem displaced from the 1930s. A few tins sit on long empty shelves; cigarettes are sold singly. Behind the village rears up a slag heap. The coal pits in this particular village

have been closed for five years. Those miners who stayed on work another mine nearby.

"This seems to be what you want," says Janet. "A really poor mining village with some really poor miners in it."

I had stayed the night before with Janet and Michael in their Edinburgh apartment. The books along their walls marked the burgeoning of New Left intellectual culture during the Sixties: works of Marxist philosophy, economics and esthetics filled shelves; copious files of *New Left Review* occupied others. The table was covered with political sheets and weeklies, largely put out by Trotskyist groups.

Janet and Michael were film freaks and we had already had a couple of arguments about the need for a political cinema. With them, deep devotion to American movies by Ford, Fuller, Dwan, and Walsh went hand in hand with a very pure conception of what makes true political cinema. Our conversations led to criticism of *State of Siege.*

"Why have Yves Montand playing the CIA man?"

"Perhaps it was to say that a CIA man need not have conspicuously repulsive aspects, but still be a repulsive person doing a repulsive job."

"He should have been played as a type. And anyway, why stick with bourgeois narratives that merely *involve* people in the film. You should leave them in a position to think, to *criticize.*"

It has been a Left decade in British culture. The political momentum which pushed towards 1968 in France, and which waned subsequently in the U.S.A., has continued in England. Janet and Michael are not, at this time, in a Left group. But many of their generation (middle to late twenties) are–pushed leftward by the conspicuous disaster of the Labor Government from 1964-69.

"I'll tell you what the ultra-left groups are looking for out of the present crisis," a friend of mine, active in one of them, remarked to me.

"General strike?"

"Well that, possibly. But mainly they want members. Big crises, special fund drives, more copies of their papers sold, more recruiting, more members. With more members, more copies of the paper sold, bigger meetings . . ."

"Then what?" I asked.

We quickly drew up the Left scenario:

1) An industrial crisis breaks out, with a strike paralyzing the economy.

2) The government attempts to break the strike, using the police and Army.

3) The impetus towards a general strike becomes irresistable.

4) General strike. The economy is paralyzed: the government all in a heap.

5) Out of trade councils and factory committees are formed workers' soviets. These are the prototypes of dual power.

6) A huge workers' congress is held amidst the blazing ruins of late capitalism. Outside, a workers' militia battles victoriously with the repressive forces.

7) Under the guidance of one of the revolutionary groups a workers' government is formed. It assumes power, expropriates the expropriators. The Revolution has occurred.

"Actually," says my friend, "most of the groups are a bit vague as to what will really happen."

His opinion was corroborated in a discussion I had with Bert Ramelson, industrial organizer of the Communist Party.

"It's a long struggle," Ramelson said emphatically. A Red Scare was going full swing in the newspapers the day we met. If the media were out searching for a Red under the bed, Ramelson was an excellent candidate. He was born in the Soviet Union, emigrated to Canada, worked on a Marxist-Zionist kibbutz in Israel in the Thirties, quit when the kibbutz refused to allow Arab labor, fought in the Spanish Civil War with the International Brigade, later fought in the Second World War, escaped from a prison camp in Italy, and finally ended up in England after the war as an organizer for the Communist Party.

So active a life has not filled Ramelson with starry hope.

"There is no doubt about it. The movement has made great advances over the last ten years. Ten years ago the trade union movement was largely controlled by right wingers. There are plenty of them still around, but the whole make up is different. But even if the trade union movement and the labor movement has shifted to the Left, that still leaves us with a Parliamentary Labor Party. I don't see much change there. Most of them are still opportunists."

Ramelson's perspective is a fairly straightforward one. He advocates imposition of socialist policies by the labor movement on a Labor leadership innately hostile to the dilemmas and crises of British capitalism. The long, long run might bring a truly socialist Parliamentary labor leadership as well.

"So you don't see the workers battling their way up Whitehall in the not-too-distant future?"

"Oh, I'm not saying that won't happen. Anything *could* happen. The situation is very volatile. I'm just saying that what the ultra-lefts don't realize is that it's a long struggle. Very long."

A long struggle. How long, oh Lord, how long?

["LET 'EM CLOSE DOWN"]

I leave Janet in the car and start walking through the miners village, knocking on doors. Finally a middle aged miner opens up, and agrees we can chat. He is having Sunday tea with his son, a tool maker. Despite the desolate aspect of the village, his house is snug. Not at all the type image I thought of from without. A large color television set dominates one side of the room. An elaborate tapedeck is softly playing songs by Jim Reed. He is poor, but no caricature.

"Aye. This village was built about a hundred years ago by a mining company. It's infamous, I suppose. A lad was bringing me the telly the other day, and he said he was frightened to walk down the streets. But when he got inside he said he preferred it to his modern block in the town. You can see the sun here. They'll be knocking it down this year."

This is the day before the miners voted 81 percent in favor of a strike.

"Oh, aye, I'm all in favor of a strike. Look, I cross into

the pit head at 6 in the morning. I change, go down into the pit, and let's say I'm ready to work at 6:40 a.m. Well, that's when I start getting paid. And I take home £28 (about $60) a week. Look at the prices, lad. Me and my wife can't live on that."

His father had been on strike in the famous miners strike of 1926. The miners stayed out for several months, but finally lost.

"I can remember that. Of course, we didn't have any strike pay, any more than we do today. He used to go pick up things in the fields, my father did. I suppose I might be doing that in a month or two myself. But mind you, I don't see it lasting that long. Industry's different now. Too much depends on coal. Too much stops if we don't get the coal out.

"You see, we just want our money. It doesn't make much difference if we're up against a Conservative or a Labor government. That Wilson is no good friend of the working man. Mind you, I'm a Labor Party voter myself, because that's the party the working man will vote for. But they didn't do much for us when they were in. Labor, Conservative, Liberal, Communist. They're all the same."

"To my way of thinking, none of them are Left enough," the son breaks in.

I ask if there is any group or party he would support.

There doesn't seem to be anyone around. But none of the ones we have are Left enough. We need someone to redistribute the wealth in this country."

"I agree with you, but look at the situation, John," his father says. "Let's face it, the country's broke. Look at those figures we saw on the news. Britain's in deficit by £2.2 billion (about $5 billion). But those Germans. They have a surplus of about the same amount. Who won the war? And this oil business has made a difference again. D'ye know how much more we'll be paying for that, from those Arabs?"

"We've just got to keep our noses above water, as it were. But I ask you. Do you think they have a right to offer a man working in dangerous conditions, practically naked some of the time, with all the dust and accidents, only £34 a week or so? You can't ask that. So when they say that the mines will have to be permanently closed down for lack of maintenance, while we're on strike, well, the lads say, Let 'em close down. We don't want to work in them. But then we know that they won't let them close down. They can't afford to. You see, we were told we were in a dying industry. But now we know we're not. And that gives the lads a lot more clout. A lot more confidence, I mean.

"I don't see how we can lose."

["A LONG WAY TO GO"]

The next morning I fly down from Edinburgh to London with Mick McGahey, the Scottish vice-president of the miners union. A Communist of unflinching directness, he has just remarked publicly that if troops were brought into mining areas the miners should remind them of their working class origins. (McGahey is often noted for allegedly having decorated the funeral bier of his 87 year old mother with a banner reading "Mrs. McGahey, murdered by capitalism.")

The heads of the Labor Party, the Conservative Party and all media have rounded on McGahey, denouncing him as a leading representative of the Communist menace which

A. DeAndrade/Magnum

was holding the nation ransom. The huge vote in favor of the strike has just come in. He is naturally jubilant, but as cautious about the future as Ramelson had been. It is a matter of slow going in the trade union movement.

McGahey, born in the middle 1920s, represents a tough generation of Left organizers. His father was a founding member of the British Communist Party. By his mid-teens he had seen the collapse of the Labor Party into the National Government and the defeat of the Spanish Republic. Later he experienced the collapse of the post-war Labor Government, the dissipation of the huge impetus to change that had grown throughout the war and, most recently, the delinquencies of the last Labor Government.

There was a time when union leaders, brought in for last-minute rap sessions with the Prime Minister during some strike, were intimidated by their fine surroundings, by grave, solemn appeals to "the national interest," by ringing announcement in the press that "ours is one nation," that class must not be set against class. Under this pressure, union leaders often crumbled.

McGahey is made of tougher material.

"Think," said one cabinet minister to him in a last-minute appeal against the strike. "Think of the long-term national interest."

"In the long run, minister," answered McGahey, quoting Keynes, "we're all dead."

"I think," McGahey says to me as we fly over the Lake District, "Heath has been forced to call an election. The papers say I'm politically motivated, or that the miners are politically motivated. Of course that's true. We want the end of Phase Three [a form of wage control imposed by the Conservative government] and if we get the end of that, which is a political ambition, and if we get the end of the Conservative government, which is also a political ambition, then of course we are politically motivated."

His colleague, Bill McLean, president of the Scottish miners and another Communist, broods about the problems of picketing.

"They say the police are practicing picket-breaking tactics. And one of the lads in the Army over in Ulster says that the big armored personnel vehicles are being rehearsed in moving pickets. They've got 11 of these things in Edinburgh, you know. Saltley won't be so easy this time."

Saltley was the battle that won the strike for the miners in 1972. The strike had lasted long enough that it was crucial for the government to get coal supplies out of the Saltley coke depot in Birmingham. Flying pickets of miners were quickly assembled. They were joined by fellow workers from the engineering factories around Birmingham. Soon there were ten thousand pickets round the depot gates. The police took one look and closed the depot down.

"Only a fool takes on ten thousand people," said the local chief of police, as he admitted defeat. It was a dreadful shock for the government, and one they have been practicing for two years to avoid next time.

"Oh, yes," says McGahey. "The pickets might be a nasty business this time. You could have provocation by the police. The lads will have to be very careful."

McGahey leans back in the plane seat as we begin the descent into London. He looks very tired and the scars, where someone had broken a bottle in his face for selling the party paper as a young man, show up whitely.

"The movement's come a long way in the last ten years. But it's a matter of time and patience. We've got a long way to go."

I think of the miner who remarked to me that "Labor, Conservative, Liberal, Communist, they're all the same." What neither Ramelson nor McGahey really discuss is the long-term changes in the labor movement—that basically mean the demise of the Labor Party as the traditional repository of hope for radical change. Initially, there was the blending of trade-union organization and funds with a largely middle-class parliamentary representation. Behind the twin forces lay the amorphous but extensive formation known as the labor movement. With innumerable setbacks, deletions, and "betrayals," this cumbersome structure lasted, in increasing disrepair, down to the mid-Sixties.

Since then, though, the decline has been more spectacular. Socialist energies have not generated young people to enter Parliament, but young people yearning to conduct revolutionary struggles in Left groups, or in women's liberation. The ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland presented images of revolution and of violent struggle utterly discordant with the idiom of a peaceful social democratic party, eager to gain votes, get seats, win an election, and be presented with the arduous task of shoring up British capitalism.

[DREAMS AND PHANTASMS]

In a sense, a full circle is coming to a close. The Left groups are discovering, as the Communist Party learned before, that the struggle cannot be fought entirely outside the Parliamentary arena. Therefore, it is a matter of getting one's forces into Parliament. This means entering the red light district of electoral parties, and indulging in furtive or lingering embraces with the rouged old bones of Madame Labor Party herself. It's the old cry, make the Labor Party a socialist party.

Brother Tactic meets Madame Strategy. There is, of course, nothing else for them to do. Similar decomposition is affecting the Conservative party, itself as elaborate a confection of class alliances as its Labor counterpart. There is no more sense imagining a full-fledged revolutionary party springing from the skull of this decaying body politic, than in fantasizing a full-fledged fascist party rising out of the moribund Conservative Party.

There is both a long-term and a short-term crisis for British capitalism. In the divided structure that houses industrial capitalism on the one hand, and finance capitalism on the other, the rickety structure of industrial capitalism is simply undercapitalized, outdated in its infrastructure and badly run. Finance capitalism is basically preoccupied with the export of capital.

At the moment, the class paying the price for this imbalance, for the huge trading deficits afflicting the British economy, is the working class. And the working class largely pays the penalty for the inflation that is following the leap in world commodity prices, and the money printed up by the Bank of England to finance that deficit.

Yet the Conservative government is simply not prepared to adjust, even minutely, the distribution of wealth

(Continued on page 59)

academic power. By this I do not mean to imply that the latter would be any more impressed by first-rate work from a frankly Marxian standpoint."

Nevertheless, Sweezy does not fail to point out that among the "radicals" there are "by no means an insignificant number of *potential* Marxists who with proper encouragement would go on to study and master the field." In this regard, while many university administrators see the decline in campus activism as a trend toward more conservative thinking among students, Sweezy sees other aspects that may be potentially fruitful for the Left. "One aspect of the decline in campus activism," he says "is a growing interest in Marxist thought. For a long time the activists ignored theory. Now many of them have settled down to study."

For Galbraith, on the other hand, there has been no settling down. The battle goes on, and he claims that orthodoxy is clearly on the defensive. "Neo-classical economists," he says, "are like the covered wagons or the herds when they are attacked. They have turned with their heads together and their rumps out, seeking protection against the enemy."

And in the science that was once known as "dismal," this is how war is fought.

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ENGLAND

(From page 37)

which would satisfy the modest claims of the miners. They have taken an uncompromising stand at the worst possible time for themselves, when the organization and morale in the trade union movement is strong enough to contemplate confrontation.

The Conservatives and most of the Labor Party would be delighted to see the trade union movement suffer a resounding defeat, an enforced retreat to the quietism of a decade ago. Undoubtedly many in the Conservative Party feel that they should give the working class a whiff of grape-shot à la Churchill. Others, mindful of the old saw, if you can't beat them, buy them, feel it would be better to pay off insurgent groups of workers and work out the bill later.

Both sides are playing the politics of bankruptcy. Labor says the country is bankrupt but won't be when it is in charge; the Conservatives say the country is not bankrupt but will be as soon as Labor takes the helm.

Meanwhile, that peaceful river which used to be called the British electorate is bursting its banks. Across the green meadow, past the vicarage gate, along the village streets, past the church with its clock at ten to three, into the grounds of the big house, trickles an uncertain tide.

No one knows where it will go. Ambitious Army officers, tumid with roast grouse, in mess halls of old England, may twitch in their sleep, and dream of saving the Constitution, of rallying vigorously to the aid of Queen and Country in the hour of trial. Hard-line Conservatives dream of stringent labor laws, no-strike laws, illegalization of "extremist sects." Bankers may dream of the successful export of their assets and their personal fortunes to some island in the sun. Labor Party ministers groan in their slumbers as they envision a hideous run on the pound the day they assume office, the collapse of the economy and the end of whatever dreams they may have had. Communists think of the long haul, the endless road. The Left groups denounce the Communists, dreaming of more members, new alliances, and general strikes.

Dreams and phantasms. British capitalism is not a dead duck yet and revolution is not just around the corner. But for the first time in over 40 years, most of the British people feel there is a crisis, and that it may be a terminal one for the present social disposition. The most popular British television program at the present time is the Colditz Story. This is the narrative saga of British prisoners of war (officers, mostly) who were imprisoned in Germany in a castle deemed escape proof by the Germans. Naturally, British ingenuity finds a way as the chaps outwit the Krauts, and struggle back to the old country.

But escape these days is a more complex matter than outwitting a few bone-headed Teutons. Many British capitalists think it will be a simple matter of paying off the miners and getting back to as much production as conditions permit. The small businessman, busy going broke during the three-day week, thinks more or less the same thing. It was Heath's supposition that the long term interest of the bourgeoisie demanded a confrontation. Thus he has had to face the enemy with divided forces, and many daggers sharpened for his back.

Wilson confronted the same problem: an opening to the Left, to accomodate the ultras, enragés, extremists, Leftists, unionists of all shades in his own ranks. He maintained a political posture horrific to his allies on the Right, in industry, in the financial sector, and in the middle classes who were prepared to countenance the later aversion to social democracy.

Behind them at their backs they hear the chariots drawing near. The *London Times* predicted starkly just after the February election was announced that Britain would have to borrow something like $30 billion in the course of the next Parliament. International bankers do not trust the Labor Party, however attenuated Labor's social policies may be. A run on the pound, agreed the *Times,* was likely the day Labor came into power. The *Times'* message was plain. Vote Conservative.

But a Conservative victory scarcely holds much appeal. No great good has come of their previous regimes. A gloomy past and a gloomy future for all. And some of the old ghosts, emerging from their rooms—the Red Menace, the dark forces of extremism—have lost the old power to terrify and to amaze. So volatile is a large portion of the electorate, so uncertain in its political instincts, that it seems, at last, as if we might be coming to one of those great divides which political soothsayers always presume to lie over the next ridge but one. We are not speaking of the romantic *folies* of Paris in 1968. The crisis which confronts Britain, which remains after the election just concluded and through the one which may yet come, will see many sorties and exits as Brother Compromise lectures the lads, Brother Headstrong councils firm action, and Father Muddlethrough goes through the old routines. What the miners brought to a head in February will not

end this month or next. Let's remember once more, Empson's laconic parody of Auden.

Shall I build a tower, boys,
knowing it will rend
Crack upon the hour, boys,
waiting for the end?
Shall I pluck a flower, boys,
shall I save or spend?
All turns sour, boys,
waiting for the end.

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R. D. LAING

(From page 26)

like air and water pollution, we have come to accept as the emblem of life in our time, our gray badge of endurance.

What seems to me to be implied inescapably by Laing's position, though he would surely reject this conclusion himself, if possible—is that freedom and self-realization have always been, and must remain, the concerns of an elite of some kind, self-defined by its very nature as an enemy of the people. If it is not to become merely another group, obsessed and corrupted by the demands of its own defense, then clearly it must be relatively invulnerable for reasons with which it need not concern itself too much from day to day. Wealth helps, but capitalism has done a superb job of defining wealth so that nobody ever seems sure he has enough and can keep it, especially in a state made fretful by an uneasy social conscience. The national conscience has enough to be fretful about, but humaneness derived from guilt is about as trustworthy as chastity imposed by gonorrhea. Neither is evidence of a change of heart.

If my reasoning is correct, demands for a just society, as social justice is now conceived, must continue to conflict very sharply with the demand for personal self-realization. It is currently fashionable to put down the "pot left" or "freak left" as a political embarrassment to true radicals, to argue that the counterculture is a drag to the revolution; that its hair and its egotism alienate the working class; that its "free schools" delay the kind of hard-nosed educational reform needed to lift children out of the ghetto and politicize their parents. All this is true; it is not inappropriate that a counterculture be counterrevolutionary. But the counterculture, counterrevolutionary or not, is in much deeper conflict with the dominant culture of our time, whether in East or West, than any current revolutionary movement conceived in political or military form.

This conflict, though profoundly political in its implications, is really metapolitical. It transcends politics, since the countercultural position perceives political action as alienating in itself. As, in Eliot's portrayal of him, Thomas à Becket came to understand:

Those who serve the greater cause
may make the cause serve them,
Still doing right: and striving with
political men
May make that cause political, not
by what they do,
But by what they are.

This is not to imply that men ought not to fight evil and social injustice. They very often must, but when they must, the price is their own objectification, their conversion—by their own consent but in ways they can seldom have anticipated or wholly accepted—into an instrument of social action.

Whatever his personal politics may be, the thrust of Laing's work, as well as much of its substance, has been the very stuff of the counterculture's vision. The old friend of Baba Ram Dass and Timothy Leary has never betrayed their joint ideal. It is finally no paradox, but a near classic example of the relationship between *yang* and *yin*, that Laing's prophetic insights into the political character of mental illness, and of experience, should have led him to a position from which politics itself can only be seen as absurd. The position is stated precisely by Laing himself, in the final paragraphs of his moving and fantastic essay *The Bird of Paradise:*

There is really nothing more to say when we come back to that beginning of all beginnings that is nothing at all. Only when you begin to lose that Alpha and Omega do you want to start to talk and to write, and then there is no end to it, words, words, words. At best and most they are perhaps in memoriam, *evocations, conjurations, incantations, emanations, shimmering, irridescent flares in the sky of darkness, a just still feasible tact, indiscretions, perhaps forgivable. . .*

City lights at night, from the air, receding, like these words, atoms each containing its own world and every other world. Each a fuse to set you off. . . . If I could turn you on, if I could drive you out of your wretched mind, if I could tell you I would let you know.

Edgar Z. Friedenberg is author of Coming of Age in America *and is working on a book called* Privilege, Bigotry, and Freedom. *He now lives in Canada and teaches at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The above will appear in his forthcoming book* R. D. Laing *(Viking Modern Masters Series).*